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ABSTRACT

This monthly newsletter of the National Staff Development Council (NSDC) promotes high levels of learning for all students and staff. It includes the following articles: "The Science of Learning Choices: NCLB Shifts its Emphasis to Scientifically-Based Research" (Joan Richardson); "Dramatic Improvement Depends on Powerful Intention, Action" (Dennis Sparks); "Together, You Can Do More" (Stephanie Hirsh); "Literacy Coaches in All Milwaukee Schools"; "Traveling Creates Closeness"; "Trust is the Key Word in Changing Schools"; "Not Every Good Plan Works"; "NSDC Awarded Grant for PD Study"; and "Scientifically-Based Research as Defined by NCLB. (SM)

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The science of learning choices

NCLB shifts emphasis to scientifically-based research

BY JOAN RICHARDSON

Just how important is "scientifically-based research" in the new far-reaching No Child Left Behind legislation?

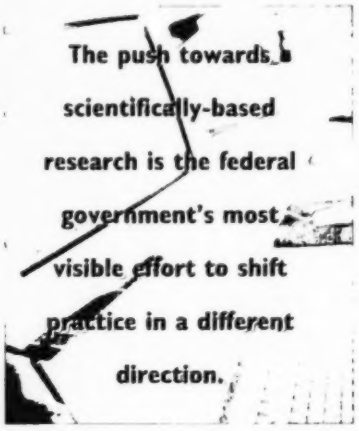
Consider this: The phrase appears 111 times in the new law.

Its repeated use is only one reason this new emphasis has elicited so much attention and concern among educators.

The concept of scientifically-based research is viewed by some as a necessary catalyst for greater accountability in education. At the same time, it's feared by others who believe the phrase comes with a political punch.

Proponents of the new language are clear about the impetus for this shift: Too much money has been invested in education and too much wasted in programs that did not get the intended results.

If educational practice is not based on research, then what has it been based on? In one of many meetings devoted to explaining NCLB, Valerie Reyna, deputy director of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, suggested that schools have largely based their practice on "tradition, superstition, and anecdotes." The push towards scientifically-based research is the federal government's most visible effort to shift practice in a different direction.


The push towards scientifically-based research is the federal government's most visible effort to shift practice in a different direction.

"The bottom line here is that these same rules about what works and how to make inferences about what works, they are exactly the same for educational practice as they would be for medical practice. Same rules, exactly the same logic whether you are talking about a treatment for cancer or whether you're talking about an intervention to help children learn," said Reyna in the NCLB meeting.

Although interest in applying the scientific standard appears to have grown out of work done on reading, that standard now will be applied to other subject areas and to professional development. This could enhance the reputation of professional development in those areas by increasing the expectation that it will have a scientific basis, said Stephanie Hirsh, NSDC deputy executive director and the staff member who closely monitors state and federal policies.

But NSDC Executive Director Dennis Sparks said he fears the reliance on scientifically-based research will not encourage or perhaps even allow schools to use the kind of job-embedded, team learning that NSDC supports and believes to be an effective form of professional learning. "The legislation seems to support a form of professional development that is only delivered in 'programs,' " he said.

Hirsh agrees. "I'm concerned that the

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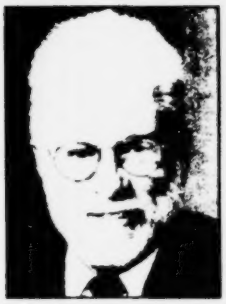
Dramatic improvement depends on powerful intention, action



Dennis Sparks is executive director of the National Staff Development Council

Clarity of intention + next action + reflection and monitoring of improvement = dramatic improvement.

Clarity of purpose, an economical and powerful expression of ideas, a sustained focus on the fundamentals, and high expectations on the part of educational leaders are inexpensive yet powerful forces that can lead to the dramatic improvement of student achievement. That realization came upon me as I recently reread a speech given a year ago by Hayes Mizell of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation in which he challenged educators to perceive school reform through the lens of the intellectual development of youngsters and adults alike.

In his speech, Mizell said: "What if you reconceived the purpose of your school systems as the intellectual development of both students and educators? ... What if your school systems said to each new teacher or principal: 'We are glad to have you. We believe you have talents and abilities that can foster the intellectual development of this community's children.

" 'But you should be aware that we expect you to also develop intellectually. No matter how much you think you know, it is not enough. Even if you know more and are smarter than the students you teach, it is not enough.

" 'For starters, we expect that each year you will keep learning more about the content you teach and how to engage students more successfully in learning that content. We expect more. We expect you to engage your colleagues in figuring out how to improve classroom instruction, curriculum, assessment, and results. We expect you to seek out and test promising new ideas from your colleagues and from others outside this school system. We expect you to pursue your own new learning aggressively, and to apply what you learn to help your students perform at standard and to improve your school.

" 'We will support you and periodically we will be interested to see how your intellectual growth is making you a more effective teacher. And, by the way, if you ever have reason to believe that this school system or your school is doing anything that gets in the way of your intellectual development, or that of your students, you are obligated to let us know about it. If you are not prepared to do these things, then perhaps you would be happier in another school system.' "

While some ideas, of course, are more powerful than others, and some "next actions" more likely than others to produce the desired results, sometimes we lose sight of the fundamentals and feel disempowered and overwhelmed by the perceived complexity of the process.

If each school developed a purpose comparable in clarity and power to that expressed by Mizell and then answered the question, "What's the next action to achieve that vision?" (and when that action was completed the school reaffirmed its purpose and determined its next action, and so on), I believe schools would make dramatic improvements in the quality of professional learning that occurs within them.

Put another way: Clarity of intention + next action + reflection and monitoring of improvement + next action (until the purpose is realized) = dramatic improvement in professional learning and student achievement. It may not be a lot more complicated than that.

"Developing the intellectual capital of your school systems' staffs," Mizell concluded, "will be the best investment you can make, but it will take courage to reconceive and redesign your school systems to make that happen." Courage and persistence born of clarity of purpose. Sustained commitment to action. Those are the essentials in developing the intellectual capital of students and staff members alike.

Dennis Sparks' newest book, *Designing Powerful Professional Development for Teachers and Principals*, is available. Price: $24, members. Order now through the NSDC Online Bookstore at www.nsdc.org/bookstore.htm.

Together, you can do more

In a results-oriented environment, principals and their staffs craft visions and establish goals. They use data to help determine the distance between the current status and the results they seek. They select strategies to close the gap to achieve the desired results. At this point, schools make a critical decision: whether to allow individuals to develop independent plans of action or to establish a context that encourages interdependent learning.

In my view, while individual learning is important to the process, team learning allows the school to take advantage of the strengths that interdependence has to offer.

Many of these benefits are similar to those of cooperative learning for students. A shared vision and set of mutually-agreed upon goals focuses the team's work and encourages a staff to work as a team rather than as independent contractors. Positive interdependence results when team members have the opportunity to contribute to the accomplishment of a goal larger than anyone could achieve alone. It results because all staff have the opportunity to contribute to achieving the goals.

Recognizing and appreciating the strengths each person brings to the team is another benefit of positive interdependence. This recognition occurs when each member can describe how he or she wants to aid in achieving the team and school goals. As strengths are surfaced, appreciation for each team member increases. At the same time, team members begin to understand why the team is essential to achieve the vision and goals for the school. Eventually, team members arrive at a point where they recognize everyone is in this together. Interdependent team work accelerates the accomplishment of goals. When team members adopt similar goals and strategies, the pace is increased. Everyone's sense of responsibility and accountability is enhanced when each member recognizes that the goals will not be achieved unless everyone "pulls their own weight." When individuals work in teams, it will soon become evident if one member is not sharing in the commitment and the work.

Team-based learning doesn't happen without support. Time (which will be addressed in next month's column) is necessary to support team learning. And yet team learning and interdependence do not occur simply because team times are arranged. Technical assistance in the form of facilitation and guidance with initial meetings will help teams function productively. Investment in the knowledge and skills that teams need to conduct their work will sustain their effort.

Most teams will benefit by understanding the characteristics of effective groups and by training in skills associated with high-performing teams. For example, teams benefit from understanding the cycles of group development (forming, norming, storming, and performing) and gaining strategies to assist with movement through the stages.

They increase their productivity when they learn the skills associated with dialogue, building consensus, and addressing conflict. Teams also become stronger when they learn skills associated with collective inquiry, group problem solving, and evaluation. Implementing these skills will take time and practice. Participation by leaders in team meetings and follow-up support by staff developers demonstrate the school's commitment to the goal and the teams. Investing the time to build the framework and skills of team members will accelerate the schools progress towards its goals.

LEARNING COMMUNITIES:

Staff development that improves the learning of all students organizes adults into learning communities whose goals are aligned with those of the school and district.

Stephanie Hirsh is deputy executive director of the National Staff Development Council

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The revised NSDC Standards for Staff Development can be found on the web site at www.nsdc.org/standards.htm

Literacy coaches in all Milwaukee schools

This fall, Milwaukee (Wisc.) Public Schools began providing a literacy coach in every school, according to a report in a newsletter published by Cross City Campaign on Urban School Reform.

"The main purpose of the Milwaukee Literacy Initiative is to have every student reading at grade level across the curriculum in reading, writing, and math. It is MPS's commitment to sustained, on-site professional development that has led them to the use of literacy coaches. The coach will be part of the permanent staff and part of the broader school-based learning team, and will model instructional strategies, provide feedback to teachers, examine student work and analyze data, and help create interventions for low-performing students," the newsletter said.

Teachers, principals, parents, and administrators visited other large districts using literacy coaches such as Houston, Providence, and Chicago, where they interviewed staff, observed classrooms, and collected data about the use of literacy coaches, the newsletter said.

The 150 coaches in Milwaukee will receive ongoing training and on-site support throughout the year to ensure success, and ultimately the success of the students. At the end of the first year, the district will establish an evaluation model that will generate data about student achievement, school climate, and personal reactions from teachers and administrators.

Source: *"Focusing on adolescent literacy,"* ***Flash Facts****, the newsletter of the Cross City Campaign on Urban School Reform, Issue #8. Available at www.crosscity.org/pubs/flashfacts.htm.*

Give away your knowledge

"Knowledge, or anything else for that matter, really doesn't exist until it is shared. Intelligent, kind-hearted people who freely share their knowledge and humanity in the workplace will find the greatest success."

Source: *"The measure of a mentor," by Joel Schettler,* ***Training****, July 2002.*

Traveling creates closeness

Japanese schools give a new meaning to the concept of "traveling teachers."

In a June 2002 *Phi Delta Kappan* article, Steven Gump describes the Japanese tradition that keeps students in their rooms and has teachers rotating to meet them. In addition, Japanese teachers have no offices of their own and instead work out of communal teachers' rooms, a practice which encourages conversation and collaboration.

Japanese teachers begin and end their teaching days in these rooms. The vice principal (whose desk is also in this room) presides over early morning meetings in the teachers' room and these meetings set the tone for the school day. At day's end, "... teachers reunite in the teachers' room to have more meetings, grade papers, prepare for the next day's classes, chat with other teachers, or relax briefly, perhaps with a cup of tea or a newspaper. ...There is always something serious being undertaken in some corner," Gump notes.

Gump discusses the advantages and disadvantages of such settings, but recognizes that "... for most American teachers, the chances are slim that any American school will abandon its current organizational ways and bring all the teachers together into such an open office space. ... For the Japanese schools and teachers I know, switching to the 'American way' would break down the social and psychological network that holds Japanese public schools together."

Source: *"Getting to the heart of public junior high schools in Japan," by Steven Gump,* ***Phi Delta Kappan****, June 2002 (Vol. 83, No. 10).*

YOU ARE **INVITED TO PRESENT** AT
NSDC'S 35TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

A RICH CULTURE OF LEADING AND LEARNING: IDEAS IN ACTION

NEW ORLEANS
2003
nsdc

NSDC'S 35TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Here is your sequence for submission:

Read this year's CRITICAL ISSUES and the descriptive questions for each.

Identify the critical issue your proposed presentation best addresses.

Review the proposal tips and proposal review process on the back of this Invitation.

Design a 55–75 word abstract describing the objectives, content, and ways participants may use the information. The description should be concise, without educational jargon, and should be written in the present active tense. Abstracts longer than 75 words may negatively affect chances for inclusion in the program. Consider the following acceptable example:

When given the opportunity to work collaboratively toward common goals, teachers can make powerful differences in student learning! Examine how educators in the Anywhere School District in Louisiana have planned and delivered supportive conditions for teachers to design lessons, critique student work, analyze data, and create job-embedded professional learning opportunities. Learn how district principals have provided teams of teachers with the skills, support, and leadership that have led to significant increases in student learning.

Consider submitting a *proposal to present* at:

NEW ORLEANS 2003

Critical Issues:

#1 DEVELOPING POLICIES AND ADVOCACY FOR QUALITY STAFF DEVELOPMENT

#2 DEVELOPING SCHOOL AND DISTRICT LEADERS WHO SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

#3 USING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING TO CLOSE THE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT GAP

#4 USING STANDARDS TO IMPROVE LEARNING FOR ALL STUDENTS

CONTEXT: What policies and resources are necessary to support effective staff development? **PROCESS:** What are successful advocacy strategies for influencing effective staff development policies and resource allocations? **CONTENT:** What are critical elements of effective staff development policies at local, state, and federal levels?

CONTEXT: In what ways do the structures and culture of the organization develop and support leadership for professional learning for all educators? **PROCESS:** In what ways do leaders learn effective strategies and skills to support professional learning? How does technology assist in the development and support of leadership? **CONTENT:** What research-based knowledge and skills do leaders use to design and implement professional learning?

CONTEXT: How do the structures and culture of the organization support the closing of the achievement gap? **PROCESS:** What are effective ways to learn and apply the knowledge and skills needed to close the achievement gap? How does technology assist adults in designing strategies to close the achievement gap? **CONTENT:** What are the research-based knowledge, skills, and dispositions educators need to close the achievement gap?

CONTEXT: How do the structures and culture of the organization support the application of standards to improve learning for all? **PROCESS:** What professional learning processes are used to support the application of standards? How does the use of technology support the application of standards? **CONTENT:** What are critical elements of standards that are used to raise achievement and improve learning?

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List the intended participant outcomes for the session. In other words, what will participants know and be able to do as a result of participation in the session? In what ways are you allowing time so participants may consider your content and plan to use their new knowledge in their work settings? (You may use the same page for #4 and #5.)

Provide the session agenda and design in the following format (no more than one page):

Time
(How much time for each part of your presentation?)

Content
(What content will be presented/learned?)

Process
(How will the participants be engaged with the learning?)

Provide the answers to the following questions (not to exceed one page for all of the answers combined):

- What specific research supports the importance of the session topic?
- What are the presenter qualifications?
- What prerequisite skills or knowledge do the participants need in order to learn from the presentation?

Provide a one-page resume for each presenter.

Submit four sets of:

- A cover page which includes the title and all presenter names
- The Invitation to Present tear off sheet (both sides)
- Abstract of the session and participant outcomes (#4 and #5)
- Session agenda and design (#6)
- Answers to the questions listed in #7
- Presenter and co-presenter resumes

CONTEXT: What structures and cultures support the improvement of low-performing schools? **PROCESS:** In what ways do educators learn the research-based content and skills necessary to improve the low performance of students in these schools? How could technology be used to enhance the improvement of low-performing schools? **CONTENT:** What are the critical knowledge and skills educators use to improve low-performing schools?

CONTEXT: How do the structures and culture of the organization support the improvement of the quality of teaching? **PROCESS:** What professional learning processes improve the quality of teaching? How can the use of technology positively affect the quality of teaching? **CONTENT:** What research-based knowledge and skills are critical to improve the quality of teaching?

CONTEXT: What structures and culture are necessary to support the evaluation of professional learning for the improvement of student learning? **PROCESS:** What are effective processes for linking staff development and student learning? How does the use of technology assist in the evaluation of professional learning? **CONTENT:** What staff development designs result in improved student learning?

CONTEXT: What staff development structure and culture issues are emerging? **PROCESS:** What significant professional learning process issues are emerging? **CONTENT:** What staff development knowledge, skills, and issues are emerging?

CONTENT: What are the structures and the culture of schools and districts that impact effective staff development design and implementation? **PROCESS:** What are effective ways to design and implement powerful staff development? How can technology contribute to fundamentally sound staff development practices? **CONTENT:** What are the primary knowledge and skills for powerful staff development design and implementation?

#5 USING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING TO FACILITATE THE IMPROVEMENT OF LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS

#6 ENHANCING THE QUALITY OF TEACHING

#7 ASSESSING THE EFFECTS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

#8 EXPLORING THE EMERGING ISSUES IN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

#9 LEARNING AND IMPLEMENTING THE KEY CONCEPTS AND SKILLS OF EFFECTIVE STAFF DEVELOPMENT

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Program Proposal: Invitation to Present

You are invited to submit a proposal to present at NSDC's 35th Annual Conference. Proposals must be postmarked by January 31, 2003 and four collated invitation sets mailed to: Mike Murphy • 1309 Melrose Drive • Richardson, Texas 75080

No fax or e-mail copies accepted. Send inquiries to: NSDCMurphy@aol.com. You will be notified of the status of your application by May 1, 2003.

Lead Presenter _____

Employer _____

Title _____

Preferred Mailing Address ☐ Home ☐ Office _____

City/State/Province/Postal Code _____

Preferred Telephone _____ ☐ Home ☐ Office

Fax _____ E-mail Address _____

Title of Presentation _____

Critical Issue (list only one) _____

Are you willing to participate in electronic communication with participants prior to and following your conference session?

☐ Yes ☐ No

MAIL TO:
Mike Murphy
1309 Melrose Dr.
Richardson, Texas
75080

nsdc

No fax or e-mail proposals will be accepted. Send inquiries to Mike Murphy at NSDCMurphy@aol.com

Co-Presenter _____

Employer _____

Title _____

Preferred Mailing Address ☐ Home ☐ Office _____

City/State/Province/Postal Code _____

Preferred Telephone _____ ☐ Home ☐ Office

Fax _____ E-mail Address _____

Co-Presenter _____

Employer _____

Title _____

Preferred Mailing Address ☐ Home ☐ Office _____

City/State/Province/Postal Code _____

Preferred Telephone _____ ☐ Home ☐ Office

Fax _____ E-mail Address _____

STATEMENT OF INTENT

My co-presenters and I agree to take part in this program, register for the conference, and pay registration fees. We also agree to adhere to the NSDC's policy prohibiting commercialism in presentations. I understand that if this proposal is accepted, I will be responsible for notifying each of my co-presenters regarding the status of the proposal and the date, time, and location of the presentation.

_____ _____

Signature of Lead Presenter Date

CONTINUE ON OTHER SIDE...

A RICH CULTURE OF LEADING AND LEARNING: IDEAS IN ACTION

Remember to mail four invitation sets by January 31, 2003 to: Mike Murphy 1309 Melrose Dr. Richardson, Texas 75080

No fax or e-mail copies accepted. Send inquiries to: NSDCMurphy @aol.com. You will be notified of the status of your application by May 1, 2003.

FORMAT (CHECK ONE)

- ◯ BOOK TALK: The agenda addresses a book that participants are expected to read in advance of the session.
- ◯ CONVERSATION: The agenda is built around a series of questions with the presenter serving primarily as facilitator.
- ◯ INTERACTIVE: Limited content delivered by the presenter, and a vast majority of time (75 percent or more) spent in a variety of interactive learning modes.
- ◯ INTERACTIVE LECTURE: Session is 50/50 split in time dedicated to presenter(s) lectures and audience interacting with the content.
- ◯ PANEL: More than two presenters in direct instruction format with the audience.
- ◯ SIMULATION: Participants will be engaged in a commercially or individually-developed interactive learning game for the majority of the session.

LENGTH (CHECK ONE)

- ◯ 2 hours
- ◯ 3 hours
- ◯ 4 hours
- ◯ 5 hours

INTENDED AUDIENCE
(CHECK NO MORE THAN THREE)

- ◯ Superintendents
- ◯ District office personnel
- ◯ Principals/assistant principals
- ◯ Teacher leaders
- ◯ State/regional agency or association personnel
- ◯ Site-based staff development specialists
- ◯ District staff developers
- ◯ University personnel
- ◯ Community/educational partners
- ◯ Classified/support staff

AUDIENCE LEVEL (CHECK ONE)

- ◯ Beginning: Session planned for participants with limited background in the content.
- ◯ All Levels: Session planned for attendees of all experience levels.
- ◯ Advanced: Session planned for attendees who have experience and knowledge of the session content.

PARTICIPANTS WILL LEAVE PROPOSED SESSION WITH:
(CHECK ONE)

- ◯ New knowledge
- ◯ A deeper understanding
- ◯ New skills

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PROPOSAL TIPS

1 Your abstract should give a clear picture of the content of the session as well as the kinds of processes you will use to actively engage the learning of your participants.

2 Participant outcomes should be statements of the knowledge and skills participants will have at the end of your session, **not** what the participants will do during the session. It is imperative that you build in time for participants to consider their learning and reflect with other session participants.

3 Carefully design your session so there is a variety of activity during the session.

4 The cited research should **specifically** support your content and topic.

5 Lecture sessions are not suitable for concurrent sessions.

6 If proposals are not sent in the correct order or if there is incomplete information, the proposal review will be delayed and the proposal will not receive maximum review points.

7 It is imperative to include **complete co-presenter information** on your Invitation to Present form. The lead presenter must be responsible for ongoing communication with all of his or her co-presenters.

8 If the "beginning" level is selected for your audience, participants will leave with either new knowledge or new skills. A "deeper understanding" applies only to advanced sessions.

9 The deadline for proposals will be strictly maintained!

TIPS AND THE REVIEW PROCESS

Proposals are reviewed by NSDC staff, members of the Annual Conference Planning Committee, and members of the local Host Committee. Each proposal is read by five reviewers and scored using the following criteria and 50 possible points:

1 To what degree does the proposal address the descriptions and/or issues in the identified conference critical issue? 1–8 points

2 Is the content relevant to the participants of the conference and to staff development? 1–8 points

3 Does the presenter clearly identify what the participants will know and be able to do as a result of their attendance at the session? 1–10 points

4 Are the presentation time, content, and process aligned with the intended outcomes as well as consistent with quality staff development design? 1–10 points

5 Does the presenter support the topic with appropriate research? 1–5 points

6 Is the proposal complete and in the required form? 1–3 points

7 This year, up to six additional points with be added to the proposal score if the presenters include district or school-based personnel who have implemented the content or skills and can show positive results.

Incomplete proposals will be delayed until complete information is provided by the lead presenter, and these proposals will not receive maximum points.

Please limit submissions to two proposals. If two proposals are submitted, at least one of the proposals should include a second presenter. You will be notified by May 1, 2003 regarding your inclusion in the conference program.

PROPOSAL REVIEW PROCESS

National Staff Development Council
P.O. Box 240 • Oxford, OH 45056
800-727-7288 • Fax 513-523-0638
NSDCOffice@aol.com
www.nsdc.org

POWERFUL WORDS

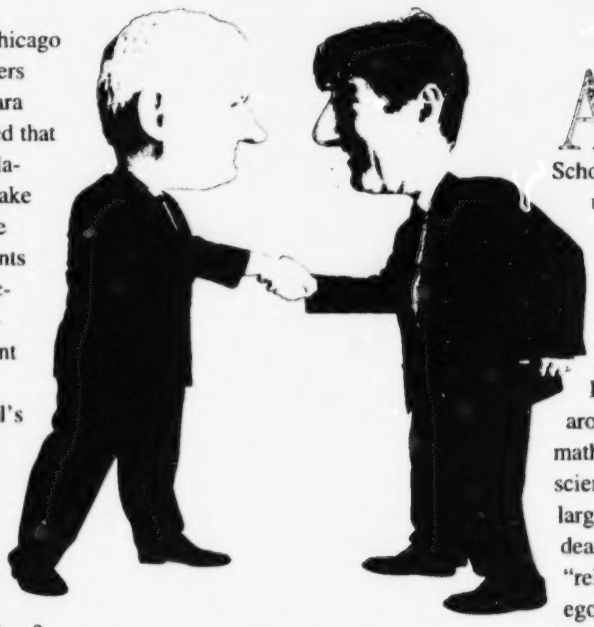
"The true test of character is not how much we know how to do, but how we behave when we don't know what to do."

— John Holt

TRUST

is the key word in changing schools

After a 10-year study of Chicago school reforms, researchers Anthony Bryk and Barbara Schneider have concluded that schools with a high degree of "relational trust" are more likely to make the kind of changes that help raise student achievement. Improvements in such areas as classroom instruction, curriculum, teacher preparation, and professional development have little chance of succeeding without improvements in a school's social climate, says an article in the *Harvard Education Letter.*



Bryk and Schneider suggest four vital signs for identifying and assessing trust in schools:

- **Respect:** Do we acknowledge one another's dignity and ideas? Do we interact in a courteous way?
- **Competence:** Do we believe in each other's ability and willingness to fulfill our responsibilities effectively?
- **Personal regard:** Do we care about each other both professionally and personally? Are we willing to go beyond our formal roles and responsibilities to go the extra mile?
- **Integrity:** Can we trust each other to put the interests of students first, especially when tough decisions have to be made? Do we keep our word?

"Trust is the 'connective tissue' that holds improving schools together, write Bryk and Schneider. ... Although power in schools, as in most institutions, is not distributed evenly....all parties are ultimately dependent on each other to succeed. ... On a daily basis, trust is raised or diminished depending on whether the way we act—and why—is consistent with the expectations we have agreed to. ... They contend that 'the fulfillment of obligations entails not only "doing the right thing," but also doing it in a respectful way, and for what are perceived to be the right reasons.' "

Source: *"Fuel for reform: The importance of trust in changing schools," by David Gordon,* ***Harvard Education Letter****, July/August 2002 (Vol. 18, No. 4).*

Not every good plan works

A "well-designed, well-funded effort" at Chicago's Manley High School "failed dramatically" in upgrading the skills of veteran teachers, according to an evaluator of the project.

The three-year, $1.1 million program in partnership with the University of Illinois at Chicago centered around four full-time coaches in math, English, social studies, and science. An editorial cited three large problems: moving too fast, a dearth of coaching talent, and "relationship problems involving ego, fear, race, rank, age, and all the other thorny issues that make workplace improvement so difficult."

These latter problems might have been mitigated, the editorialist observed, "had all the leaders involved in the project had more training in nurturing change, which requires mutual trust."

Source: *"Professional development takes center stage: Seen as a model, Manley plan falls short," by Elizabeth Duffrin,* ***Catalyst: Voices of Chicago school reform****, June 2002 (Vol. 13, No. 9). Available online at www.catalyst-chicago.org.*

COVER STORY

The science of learning choices

Continued from Page One

legislation does not give equal credibility to programs invented by teachers for the good of students," she said. For example, action research which has become highly regarded by staff developers probably would not be viewed as "scientifically-based research" under the legislation. "But we have countless examples of teachers who have transformed their practice and are getting better results with their students as a result of doing action research," Hirsh said.

WHAT IS SCIENTIFICALLY-BASED RESEARCH?

The NCLB legislation is quite specific when it refers to "scientifically-based research." (See the complete definition on Page 8.) The definition references "experimental or quasi-experimental designs."

The so-called gold standard of research are randomized clinical trials or the "experimental design" identified in the legislation. In these trials, individuals are randomly assigned to groups and the same treatment is used for each group. Very little of this research has been done in education in the United States, said University of Kentucky professor Thomas Guskey, who teaches research methods to graduate education students.

The measurements used in the research must yield the same results regardless of who does the research or how many times it's replicated and independent experts also must indicate that they accept that research by publishing it in a peer-reviewed journal or through some other means.

One of the few examples of a randomized study in education was a Tennessee project to evaluate the impact of small class size. Students were randomly assigned to small classes and teachers were randomly assigned to teach those classes. There have also been randomized studies on the effectiveness of drug prevention programs, according to speakers at one of the many NCLB meetings.

Hirsh expresses an oft-heard concern about using the randomized study in education: "If you believe something is good for students and you forcibly caused some of them not to participate in it in the name of establishing experimental design, what happens to the kids who could have benefited? What happens to the adults who could have benefited?"

Because of this ethical dilemma, Guskey said, American educational researchers have more often used quasi-experimental designs. In these situations, researchers have, for example, matched individuals or groups participating in a program with those who are not participating and then examined the results attained by both groups.

For example, a researcher might invite teachers to volunteer to participate in a mathematics program. One hundred teachers volunteer and the researcher randomly selects 50 to participate. The participants are in the experimental group; non-participants in the control group. The researcher collects data on both groups and can draw reasonable conclusions about the impact of the program by examining the activities and results of both groups.

"It's not as good as randomization, but it's better than using non-matched groups," said Guskey who has frequently used this method when studying the work of teachers.

At the lower level of inferential research are single group pre- and post-designs. In this type of work, researchers examine data collected both before and after a program is implemented. Many of the structural changes in schools have been examined in this way, Guskey said.

What pre- and post-designs lack, however, is a control group. "Without a control group, a lot of other factors could contribute to the result," Guskey said.

Farther down the research hierarchy is descriptive research. Three primary types of descriptive research used in education are correlational studies, case studies and surveys. In a survey, researchers question a large group about a variety of items and then look for relationships in the different responses. In a case study, researchers observe and record the behavior and activities of participants and explain what they have seen. Correlational studies explore relationships between different measures.

"This kind of descriptive research can give you wonderful information," Guskey said. "But it is not complete information." While it may yield extensive detail about a small sample, educators cannot "generalize" from that information to determine its applicability to a wider group.

Research done in this way may be able to establish an association between certain factors but it cannot determine a cause-and-effect relationship.

Guskey and Hirsh both urge educators to become savvy consumers of research.

"A key piece of this is identifying quality research in the first place," Guskey said. Too often, he said, educators simply get on the Internet and search on a topic without regard to quality. Instead, he urges educators to do ERIC searches and to become more familiar with refereed journals from the American Educational Research Association.

Even a strong research base does not mean the research was conducted in a situation similar to the context of the school or district in which it's being considered, Hirsh said. "If you don't have the same context, you can't expect similar results," she said.

"On the positive side, I hope this requirement will encourage people to dig deeper and not just accept when someone a program is research-based. If this legislation makes that happen, that's good news for the field," Hirsh said.

NSDC awarded grant for PD study

The North Carolina Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee recently awarded a contract to the National Staff Development Council to conduct a five-month study of professional development provided for public school professionals in North Carolina.

The North Carolina study will analyze the effectiveness and organization of the professional development programs administered under The University of North Carolina (UNC) System's Center for School Leadership Development and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. NSDC will examine the use and impact of state dollars directed at professional learning. NSDC will present findings in the form of analyses and recommendations for state-funded and directed professional development services and programs.

Betty Ann Fults is project director. Fults is a former district administrator and frequent contributor to many NSDC initiatives. Assisting with the project is Eric Hirsch, executive director of the Alliance for Quality Teaching in Denver, Colo. Hirsch was formerly with the National Conference of State Legislators and has worked with NSDC on the 12-state advocacy project, Staff Development Leadership Councils (SDLCs). Dennis Sparks, Hayes Mizell, and Thomas Guskey will be reviewers for the interim and final reports. NSDC staff members Stephanie Hirsh and Joellen Killion also will provide support.

NSDC appreciates the confidence the legislature has shown in selecting it to do this important work. NSDC expects to learn important lessons in North Carolina and be helpful to the legislature and the important decisions it must make.

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MAIN BUSINESS OFFICE
PO Box 240, Oxford, Ohio 45056
(513) 523-6029
(800) 727-7288
(513) 523-0638 (fax)
E-mail: NSDCoffice@aol.com
Web site: www.nsdc.org

Editor: Joan Richardson
Designer: Sue Chevalier

NSDC STAFF
Executive director
Dennis Sparks (SparksNSDC@aol.com)
Deputy executive director
Stephanie Hirsh (NSDCHirsh@aol.com)
Director of publications
Joan Richardson (NSDCJoan@aol.com)
Director of programs
Mike Murphy (NSDCMurphy@aol.com)
Director of special projects
Joellen Killion (NSDCKillio@aol.com)
Business manager
Leslie Miller (NSDCLeslie@aol.com)

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RESOURCES

Scientifically-based research as defined by NCLB

The "No Child Left Behind" Act of 2001 defines scientifically-based research in this way.

"The term 'scientifically-based research' (A) means research that involves the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs; and (B) includes research that:

— employs systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment;

— involves rigorous data analyses that are adequate to test the stated hypotheses and justify the general conclusions drawn;

— relies on measurements or observational methods that provide reliable and valid data across evaluators and observers, across multiple measurements and observations, and across studies by the same or different investigators;

— is evaluated using experimental or quasi-experimental designs in which individuals, entities, programs, or activities are assigned to different conditions and with appropriate controls to evaluate the effects of the condition of interest, with a preference for random-assignment experiments, or other designs to the extent that-condition controls;

— ensures that experimental studies are presented in sufficient detail and clarity to allow for replication or, at a minimum, offer the opportunity to build systematically on their findings; and

— has been accepted by a peer-reviewed journal or approved by a panel of independent experts through a comparably rigorous, objective, and scientific review."

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